

1. (Currently amended) Communication apparatus that limits the sounds of the user speaking into the apparatus emanating outwardly to the surrounding environment so as to avoid disturbing people in that environment while enhancing the privacy of the user, said apparatus comprising, in combination:

a. a communication input device having a front surface that lies in a generally transverse plane, the area forwardly of said plane defining an external input area into which the user of the device speaks to communicate with to the device,

b. a body of sound-absorbing material, and

c. attachment means for mounting said body ~~on said~~ outwardly adjacent to the communication input device in an operative position for blocking and absorbing sounds of the user speaking into the input area so as to substantially reduce such sound passing outwardly to the surrounding environment.

said body being positioned generally at or rearwardly of said plane, thereby allowing substantially unobstructed inward passage of all sound including speech from the user from forwardly of said plane to the input device, in proximity to said input area, but without blocking a substantial portion of said input area, said body generally facing the user speaking into the input area to thereby reduce sound emitted to the surrounding environment from such speaking.

2. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein said body is positionable both in an operable position and in a non-operable position.

3. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2 wherein said body is permanently connected to said communication device and is selectively movable by the user between an operable position and a non-operable position.

4. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 2 wherein said body is removeably attachable to said communication device in an operative position, and is selectively removable by the user to a non-operative position.

5. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein said attachment means is a pivoted hinge, and said body of sound-absorbing material is in the form of a generally flat screen movable between a non-operative position which reduces the space occupied by the apparatus and an operative position extending outwardly from said input area.

6.(Original) The apparatus of Claim 2 wherein said body of sound-absorbing material is in the form of a sleeve slidable between an non-operative generally telescoped over said communication device and an operative position adjacent to said input area.

7. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein said body extends substantially outwardly of said input area so as to block emanation of sound from the user speaking into said input area.

8.(Original) The apparatus of Claim 2 wherein said body of sound-absorbing the material is in the form of an arcuate surface extending around but spaced from said input area.

9. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein said body substantially surrounds said input area.

10.(Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 further comprising a rigid or semi-rigid backing, said body of sound-absorbing material being in the form of a layer mounted on said backing.

11.(Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein said body is made of one or more of the following group: cork, rubber, foam, natural or artificial compounds of inert material, and electronic devices that absorb sound.

12. (Original) A method of utilizing a communication device so as to reduce the ambient sound produced when the user speaks into the device, said communication device having an input area into which the user of the device speaks for communicating with the device, said method comprising the steps of:

- a. providing a communication device having an external input area,
- b. providing a body of sound-absorbing material,
- c. positioning the body of sound-absorbing material in an operative position which is generally facing the user speaking into the input area, is in proximity to the input area, but does not block a substantial portion of the input area, such positioning of the body of sound-absorbing material being for the purpose of allowing speech from the user to freely and directly reach the at the input area while reducing the peripheral or emanating from that speaker sound reaching the surrounding environment.

13. (Currently amended) A method of utilizing a communication input device in a manner that reduces so as to reduce the ambient sound produced sound in the surrounding environment so as to avoid disturbing people in that environment while enhancing the privacy of the user, when the user speaks into the device, ~~said the~~ communication input device having a front surface that lies in a generally transverse plane, the area forwardly of said plane defining an input area into which the user of the device speaks for to communicating with to the device, said method comprising the steps of:

- a. ~~providing a communication device having an external input area;~~
- b. ~~a. providing a sound-absorbing body means,~~
- c. ~~b. positioning the body sound-absorbing means outwardly adjacent to the input device in an operative position which is generally facing the user speaking into the input device so as to block and absorb sound spoken by the user into the input area to thereby substantially reduce such sound passing outwardly to the surrounding environment, said means not significantly extending into the input area so that sound coming to the input device from in front of the plane, including sound of the user speaking into the input area, is unimpeded, area, is in proximity to the input area, but does not block a substantial portion of the input area; such positioning of the body being for the purpose of allowing speech from the user to freely and directly reach the input area while reducing the peripheral or emanating speech from that speaker reaching the surrounding environment.~~

14. (Original) The method of Claim 13 comprising the additional step of selectively positioning the body of sound-absorbing material in a non-operative position when the communication device is not in use to reduce the external envelope of the communication device.

15. (Original) The method of Claim 14 wherein the selectively positioning step comprises removing the body from the communication device.

16. (Original) The method of Claim 14 wherein the body is permanently attached to the communication device, and the selectively positioning step comprises moving the attached body.

17. (Currently amended) For Communication apparatus that limits the sounds of the user speaking into the apparatus emanating outwardly to the surrounding environment so as to avoid disturbing people in that environment while enhancing the privacy of the user, said apparatus being for use with a communication input device having a front surface that lies in a generally transverse plane, the area forwardly of said plane defining an external input area into which the user of the device speaks to communicate with to the device, sound-absorbing said apparatus comprising:

a. sound-absorbing panel that includes a rigid or semi-rigid backing sheet and a layer of sound-absorbing material and mounted on the backing sheet, and

b. attachment means for mounting said sound-absorbing panel ~~on said outwardly adjacent to the~~ communication input device in an operative position for blocking and absorbing sounds of the user speaking into the input area so as to substantially reduce such sound passing outwardly to the surrounding environment, said body being positioned generally at or rearwardly of said plane, thereby allowing substantially unobstructed inward passage of all sound including speech from the user from forwardly of said plane to the input device, in proximity to said input area but without blocking a substantial portion of said input area, said sound-absorbing material generally facing the user speaking into the input area to thereby reduce sound emitted to the surrounding environment from the such speaking.

18. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 17 wherein said attachment means affords movement of said body of sound-absorbing material between said operable position and a non-operable position which reduces the space occupied by the communication device and the sound-absorbing apparatus.

19. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein said body extends substantially outwardly of said input area so as to block emanation of sound from the user speaking into said input area.

20. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said body of sound-absorbing material is selected from the following group: cork, rubber, foam, natural or artificial compounds of inert material, and electronic devices that absorb sound.